

Enviro FACTSHEET

ABANDONED WELLS

Plugging of oil and gas wells a \$76 million liability

Over the last 100 years more than 125,000 oil and natural gas wells have been drilled throughout West Virginia. Many of these wells are no longer active and have not been plugged, or have been improperly plugged. Collectively they present a significant environmental and safety threat.

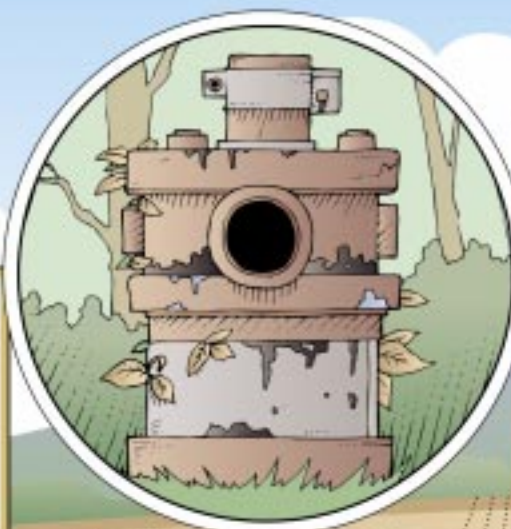
In 1929, the state of West Virginia began requiring permits for the drilling of oil and natural gas wells. The Office of Oil and Gas has regulatory authority in this area and maintains a database of wells permitted since that time. From this database, approximately 10,000 wells are identified as having no production reported. By state law, abandoned wells are those that are out of production for a period of 12 consecutive months and have no future use.

To address those wells drilled prior to 1929, the Office of Oil and Gas embarked on a project, for identification purposes, with the West Virginia Geologic and Economic Survey (WVGES). Through this project, approximately 35,000 wells were inventoried, through file research, as having an unknown status. The Office has further defined the wells in the survey through field inspections. Results of the survey (detailed in the pie chart) show that 26 percent, or about 9,100 wells, should be classified as abandoned.

The cost of plugging abandoned wells, where no responsible party can be located, becomes the state's responsibility. These wells are categorized, based on their environmental and safety risk, into three classes. State law requires the plugging of Class 1 (most risky) wells first. The number of Class 1 wells within the total 19,100 abandoned wells mentioned above, is unknown. If a reasonable estimate of 20 percent of these wells are Class 1, the state is facing a liability in excess of \$76 million, for this class, based on an average plugging cost of \$20,000 per well.

For more information contact:

WVDEP- Office of Oil and Gas
Abandoned Well Program
(304) 558-6075



Abandoned wells are both hidden and have pipe sticking out of the ground.

How abandoned wells pollute

Examples of how Class 1 wells contaminate the surface, ground water and mineral deposits

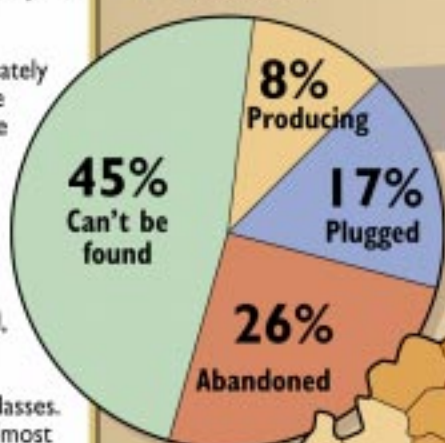
A Leakage around the surface of oil, natural gas, or saltwater can contaminate soils and local water sources.

B Ground water aquifers can be infiltrated. Natural gas that migrates into a landowner's water well may become an explosive danger.

C Wells can pose a physical impediment to mining operations or be a safety hazard to miners from natural gas penetrating the coal seam.

WVGES well survey results

Breakdown of the 35,000 wells identified in the project



West Virginia's abandoned wells

